DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 071 CG 020 434

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TITLE Wife Battering: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Etiology.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 72p.; Doctoral research paper, Biola University.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Dissertations/Theses - Undetermined (040)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Battered Women; *Counseling Techniques; *Family Violence; *Interpersonal Relationship; Intervention; *Spouses; *Theories

ABSTRACT

A review of the literature was conducted relevant to the history of wife battering, the incidence of such abuse in the United States, and difficulties in the definition of domestic violence. Major attempts to explain wife battering found in the literature included a focus on: (1) personality factors of the individuals involved (the ontogenic approach); (2) investigation of systemic variables within the marital dyad (microsystem perspective); (3) exploration of the influence of external stressors on the couple (exosystem approach); and (4) emphasis on the impact of sociocultural sexism on the development of wife battering (macrosystem perspective). Each of these approaches offers insight into the problem, but none covers all of the factors involved in wife battering. Effective intervention must deal with wife battering from all four perspectives, with safety being the first consideration. On the ontogenic level, individual therapy and separate group therapy for battered women and the husbands is the treatment of choice. Microsystem intervention would involve conjoint therapy with both the husband and wife. On the exosystem and macrosystem levels, society can help by funding and advertising shelters, and by raising public awareness of the seriousness of wife battering. (Author/NB)

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ED290071

WIFE BATTERING: A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO ETIOLOGY

A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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by

Marian B. Deitz

May, 1987

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WIFE BATTERING: A MULTI-FACETED

APPROACH TO ETIOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

WIFE BATTERING: A MULTI-FACETED APPROACH TO ETIOLOGY

Marian B. Deitz

This paper begins by reviewing literature relevant to the history of wife battering, the incidence of such abuse in the United States, and difficulties in the definition of domestic violence. Major attempts to explain wife battering in the literature include a focus on personality factors of the individuals involved (the ontogenic approach), investigation of systemic variables within the marital dyad (microsystem perspective), exploration of the influence of external stressors on the couple (exosystem approach), and emphasis on the impact of socio-cultural sexism on the development of wife battering (macrosystem perspective). Each of these approaches offers insight into the problem, but none covers all of the factors involved in wife battering. A multi-faceted approach to understanding the etiology of wife battering and to implications for its treatment is proposed.

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Wife Battering: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Etiology

In the United States, as in most other societies, women have experienced subordinate status (Straus, 1976) and have often been subjected to physical abuse as a means of ensuring that subordinate status. The first law of marriage in the western world was reportedly proclaimed by Romulus in Rome in 753 B.C. The law stated that married women were to "conform themselves entirely to the temper of their husbands and the husbands (were) to rule their wives as necessary and inseparable possessions" (O'Faolain & Martines, 1973, cited by Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978). The husband was given the legal right to punish his wife for any "misbehavior," including drinking wine, attending public games without his permission, adultery, or appearing unveiled in public. When men were absent for long periods of time during the Punic Wars, women had to assume greater responsibility and acquired greater independence. Following this period, lower-class husbands could still beat their wives, although it became illegal to beat an upper-class woman. In Europe during the Medieval period women were burned at the stake for a variety of "crimes" including scolding and nagging, talking back to a priest, masturbation, and miscarriage, even though the miscarriage was caused by a beating from her husband (Straus & Gelles, 1986). In France a man whose wife scolded him was encouraged by the

code of chivalry to "knock her to the earth, strike her in the face with his fist and break her nose" so that she would know who was master (Trevelyan, 1966, cited by Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978). In 18th century France a husband was restricted to giving "blows, thumps, kicks or punches on the back" (Castan, 1976, cited by Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978). In 18th century England, Blackstone's common law upheld the "right" of a husband to chastise his wife physically, though he was instructed to exercise restraint by not using a stick larger than his thumb in the beating. The husband's right to beat his wife was written into law in 1824 by the Supreme Court of Mississippi. In 1867 the "rule of thumb" was maintained by an appellate court in North Carolina (Straus & Gelles, 1986). In 1871, however, wife beating was declared illegal in Alabama and Massachusetts, and in 1891 a man's legal right to beat his wife was completely rejected (Eisenberg & Micklow, 1974, cited by Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978). In California it was not until 1962, however, that the "spirit" as well as the "letter" of the law (giving husbands the right to beat their wives) was also overturned. In the case of Self v. Self, the California Supreme Court overruled several earlier rulings which had upheld the doctrine of "spousal immunity" which prevented a wife from suing her husband for assault and battery (Straus, 1976). Although the law no longer upholds a man's "right" to beat his wife, violence towards one's wife is still accepted and practiced by a large segment of the American population. Demographic information concerning the attitudes and behavior of the population will be considered below.

The history of research into wife battering is a relatively short one. With the exception of several grass-roots campaigns against wife

abuse in England and the United States since 1850 (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983), it has only been within the past two decades that family violence has received attention as a distinct psychosocial problem meriting the attention of social science, mental health professionals and the legal system. Of the research that has been done on family violence, the vast majority has been in the area of child abuse. Only recently has increased attention been given to various factors associated with marital violence, particularly that form of domestic discord which has come to be known as the "battered wife syndrome." The first large-scale attempt to address the issue occurred in the 1970s as part of the feminist movement (Breines & Gordon, 1983). In fact, the volume of literature produced in the past five years exceeds the amount of work done in the previous two decades combined. Investigators have considered the demographics of wife abuse, personality factors associated with abused women, personality factors of men who batter, various theories regarding why marital violence occurs, and strategies for intervention with abused women, their abusers and the couple together.

The purpose of this paper is to review the current literature on wife abuse with a particular emphasis on causal factors, including why people enter such relationships, how the abuse develops and why the participants remain in violent partnership. The position maintained here is that no single current theory presents an adequate picture of the etiology and process of wife abuse. Weaknesses and strengths of the various approaches will also be discussed, and an integrated approach to the understanding of the issue will be presented. Implications for treatment and recommendations for future study will be noted.

Need for the Study: The Incidence of Wife Abuse

Twenty-five percent of American men and sixteen percent of women believe that it is at times appropriate for a man to strike his wife (Stark & McEvoy, 1970). Even more than for child abuse, for which there are mandatory reporting laws, estimates of wife abuse are extremely variable. In the 1970s estimates ranged from thousands to 28 million (Langely & Levy, cited by Gelles, 1980). Estimates of the extent of wife abuse were based on the number of domestic homicides, family court cases of violence, police calls and hospital emergency room treatment of women. Accuracy is hindered by definitional problems, non-representative samples and limited empirical data.

Research in the United States has found a high incidence of wife battering. Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) conducted a self-report study in 1975 based on a nationally representative sample of 2,143 families. Abuse was measured by the Conflict Tactics Scales. Sixteen percent of the sample reported marital physical violence in the year in which the survey was conducted, and 28 percent reported violence at some point during the marriage (see Figures 1 and 2). Straus et al. (1980) maintained that their findings (1.8 million wives beaten yearly) are "very likely a substantial underestimate" of wife abuse (p. 33). They argued that although wives too engage in violence against their husbands, "it would be a great mistake if (violence by wives) distracted us from giving first attention to wives as victims of social policy" (p. 43). The reasons they cited were that (a) husbands have a higher rate of the most dangerous and injurious forms of violence, (b) the husband does more damage, (c) husbands repeat violence more often,

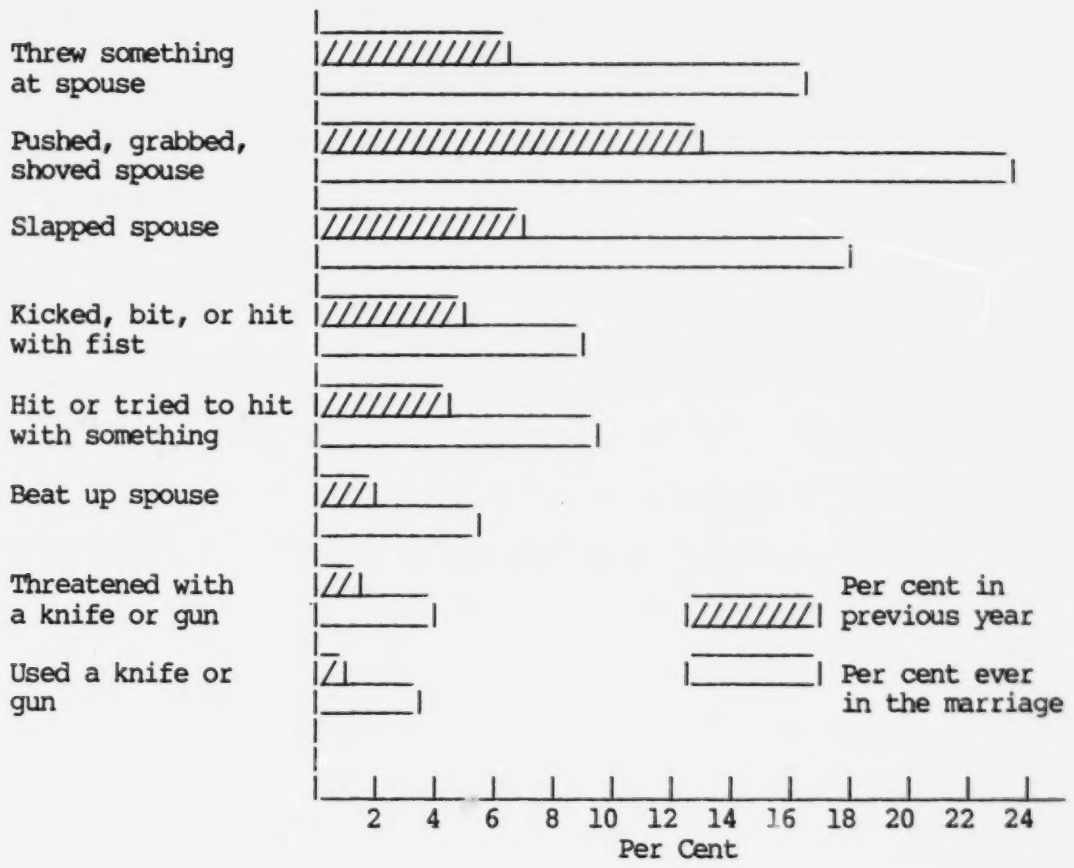

Threw something at spouse
Pushed, grabbed, shoved spouse
Slapped spouse
Kicked, bit, or hit with fist
Hit or tried to hit with something
Beat up spouse
Threatened with a knife or gun
Used a knife or gun
Per cent in previous year
Per cent ever in the marriage
2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24
Per Cent

Figure 1. Rate at which violent acts occurred in the previous year and ever in the marriage.

Note. From Behind Closed Doors (p. 33) by Straus et al., 1980.

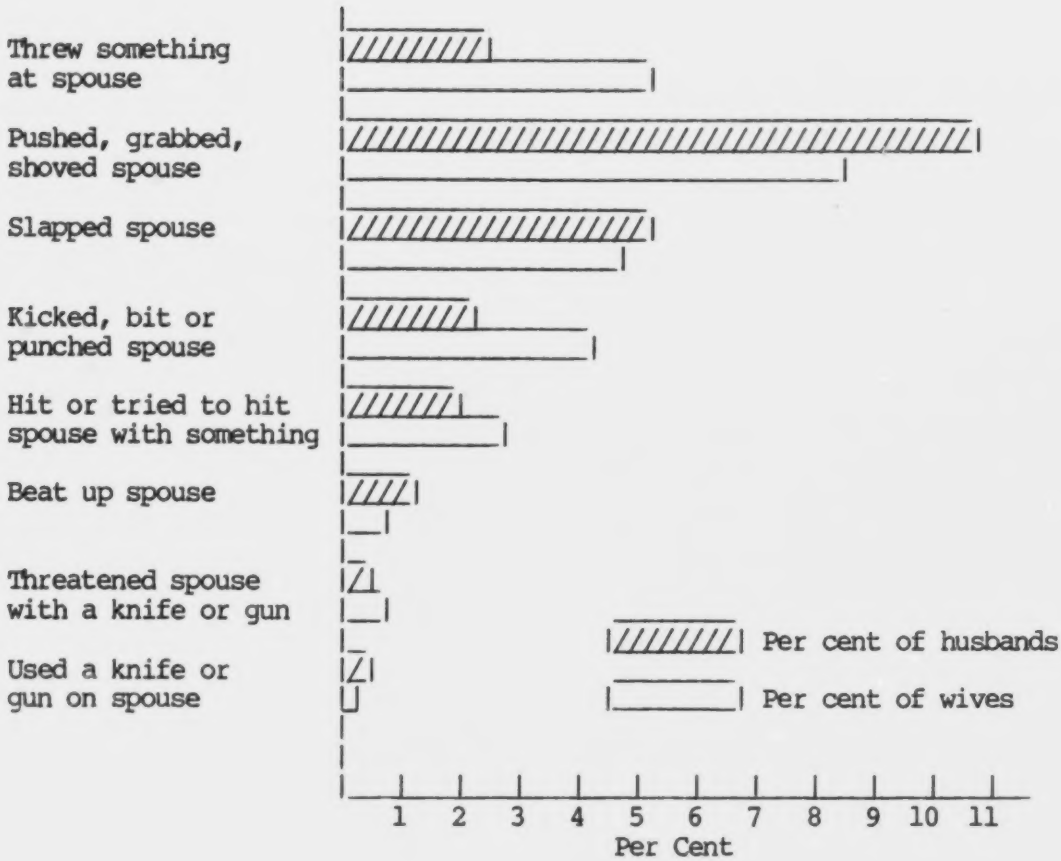

Threw something at spouse
Pushed, grabbed, shoved spouse
Slapped spouse
Kicked, bit or punched spouse
Hit or tried to hit spouse with something
Beat up spouse
Threatened spouse with a knife or gun
Used a knife or gun on spouse
Per cent of husbands
Per cent of wives
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
Per Cent

Figure 2. Comparison of husband and wife violence in previous year.

Note. From Behind Closed Doors (p. 37) by Straus et al., 1980.

(d) the data do not indicate what percent of wives' violence is self-defense, (e) a large number of husbands attack wives when they are pregnant, and (f) women are locked into marriage more than are men (pp. 43-44).

A variety of approaches have been employed in the attempt to understand why husbands beat their wives and why wives remain in abusive relationships. The present paper will attempt to show why a multi-faceted approach to understanding the etiology of wife battering is necessary. That wife abuse is a widespread phenomenon is uncontested by researchers. The precise definition of "abuse," however, is not universally agreed upon. A review of the literature on definitions of wife battering will follow.

Definition of Key Terms

Researchers in the field of family violence encounter the difficulty of definition of terms, and when a review of the various attempts is made, one is still left without clarity or commonly agreed-upon definitions. There is often a blurring of terms such as wife abuse, family violence, physical violence, and normal violence versus abusive violence. An attempt will be made to explore the controversy of definitions by examining relevant research in the area of wife battering.

Family Violence and Family Abuse

Gelles (1980) noted that one of the difficulties in the study of family violence is that the terms "violence" and "abuse" are not

synonymous. Nor would everyone agree that "hitting" and "violence" are synonymous. Most people think that spanking a child is appropriate (Straus et al., 1980) and, hence, would not define such "hitting" as "violence."

An often-cited letter to Ann Landers reflected the difficulty with definitions of abuse and violence (Straus et al., 1980, p. 39). The writer of the letter, signed "Real Happy," criticized Landers' "holier-than-thou attitude toward women whose husbands give them a well-deserved belt in the mouth." She goes on to state that "My husband hauls off and slugs me every few months and I don't mind. He feels better and so do I because he never hits me unless I deserve it. So why don't you come off it?" Clearly, even victims of beatings do not always define their experience as "violence" or "abuse." Walker (1979) has objected to the focus in wife battering research on physical violence resulting in bodily injury. She emphasized the need to take seriously the damaging effects of psychological battering. Psychological humiliation, verbal harassment and threats of physical violence are just as much abuse as physical harm. Women have trouble deciding if they are battered or not, and ask themselves: "Am I a battered woman if my husband only hits me once in a while?" "If he only threatens to hurt me and takes away my car keys for punishment, am I battered?" (p. 72).

Straus et al. (1980) tried to distinguish "force" from "violence" on the basis of "acceptable" and "non-acceptable" hitting. When this proved unworkable because there are no agreements on what is "acceptable" hitting, they decided to focus on "normal violence" and "abusive violence." They defined "normal violence" as "an act that

carried out the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (p. 20). Straus et al. state that the pain can range from a slight pain, as in a slap, to murder, and the intention can range from concern (e.g., for a child's safety) to murderous hostility. They chose the term "violence" over "aggression" or "physical aggression" and employed a broad definition including acts not typically thought to be violent (e.g., slaps, shoves) in order to cause people to question the legitimacy of violent acts. One wonders, though, why Straus et al. (1980) all but nullify their own goal by referring to one type of violence as "normal." "Abusive violence" was defined by these researchers as "an act which has the high potential for injuring the person being hit" (p. 22). Such acts included punching, kicking and biting as well as shooting and stabbing. Straus et al. admit that this definition is controversial because it does not deal with the actual effect on the recipient of the violence. The difference between "normal" and "abusive" violence is not entirely clear: Both can involve extreme violence, though only "normal" violence includes the milder forms. Gelles (1980) observed that while "violence" can refer to all forms of physical aggression, "abuse" can only refer to physical aggression that "can or does cause injury and also to nonphysical acts of maltreatment which are considered to cause harm" (p. 875). Some, like Straus et al., have constructed a continuum for grading abuse according to severity: (a) not requiring medical attention, (b) requiring outpatient attention, and (c) requiring hospitalization. Scott classified the frequency of abuse in terms of (a) regular, (b) episodic, (c) increasing, and (d) terminal (Scott, 1974, cited by Hilberman, 1980).

Normal versus Abnormal Violence

Reviewing the family violence literature in the 1970s, Gelles (1980) found that while researchers disagreed on nominal definitions of abuse, they tended to agree on operational definitions. He noted, however, that even supposedly operational definitions are not the last word, for there is bias in the labeling process. Operationally, wife abuse referred to those women who publicly admitted to having been abused or who were identified as abused through police records or social service agency records. Another definition suggested that an abused or battered wife is "one who is subjected to serious and/or repeated physical injury as a result of deliberate assaults by her spouse" (Hilberman, 1980, p. 1338). Others, however (Bograd, 1984; Breines & Gordon, 1983), have disagreed with the attempt to make distinctions between "severe" and "mild" violence, maintaining that quantitative assessment of battering does not give a true picture of what actually transpires in a battering incident because "hit wife" does not describe the injury inflicted, only the husband's action. Labeling some abuse as "mild," according to these writers, appears to suggest that it is "less bad" or more acceptable than severe abuse. This issue was highlighted by a debate between Murray A. Straus and U.S. Representative Scheuer (Breines & Gordon, 1983). Scheuer objected to Straus' use of the term "violence," which, Scheuer said, was so broad as to include everything from "mayhem to a push or a shove." Straus responded by saying that even a push or a shove would not be tolerated in the House of Representatives. The evidence of family violence suggests that far worse than pushes and shoves is tolerated in houses across the nation. Some researchers omit the milder forms such as pushes, shoves and slaps

not because these acts are acceptable, but because to include them would weaken the discriminative powers of the measurement device used in a given research study (Ÿllo, 1983). While the present writer agrees that no violence is acceptable, including slaps and pushes, it seems useful, for research purposes to maintain some definitional distinctions among several types of violence.

The Conflict Tactics Scales

Moreover, defining abuse in terms of concrete acts such as pushes, slaps, blows with fists (as is done in Straus' Conflict Tactics Scales, 1979; see Table 1) focuses only on acts and ignores the consequences of the acts. To discover that a husband slapped his wife X number of times does not describe the actual damage done and may be minimized because "slapped 5 or 6 times" does not appear terribly violent. But "slapped" does not indicate the extent of the injury which may involve bruising, jaws broken, lips split, teeth lost, nor the intimidation, loss of self esteem and other psychological ramifications. Some have objected that it is misleading to evaluate marital violence in terms of specific acts, not injuries incurred (Breines & Gordon, 1983; Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978; Gelles, 1980; Hall, 1985; Pagelow, 1985; Pleck, 1977/1978). One misleading conclusion that has been drawn is that wives are more violent than husbands (Steinmetz, 1977/1978). The emphasis on specific acts out of context ignores the fact that much of what is seen as wife abuse of husbands may in fact be self defense. Moreover, a slap by a wife is likely not as painful nor damaging as a slap by a husband, inasmuch as most men are larger and stronger than most women. The difference in physical strength is the very reason that women may more frequently resort to use of lethal objects/weapons according to those

Table 1

Conflict Tactics Scales

	IN THE PAST YEAR								EVER HAPPENED		
	NEVER	ONCE	TWICE	3-5 TIMES	6-10 TIMES	11-20 TIMES	MORE THAN 20 TIMES	DON'T KNOW	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
a. Discussed the issue calmly	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
b. Got information to back up (his/her) side of things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
c. Brought in or tried to bring in someone to help settle things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
d. Insulted or swore at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
e. Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
f. Stomped out of the room or house or yard	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
g. Cried	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
h. Did or said something to spite the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X

Table 1 (continued)

	IN THE PAST YEAR								EVER HAPPENED		
	NEVER	ONCE	TWICE	3-5 TIMES	6-10 TIMES	11-20 TIMES	MORE THAN 20 TIMES	DON'T KNOW	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
i. Threatened to hit or throw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
j. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
k. Threw something at the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
l. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
m. Slapped or spanked the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
n. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
o. Hit or tried to hit with something	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
p. Beat up the other one	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
q. Threatened with a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
r. Used a knife or gun	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X
s. Other (PROBE):_____	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	X	1	2	X

Note. From Behind Closed Doors (p. 259) by Straus et al., 1980.

who object to Steinmetz's (1977/1978) research. Although the Conflict Tactics Scales is used frequently in research, not all are satisfied with it. In addition, such quantitative methods do not uncover the subjective meanings underlying actions and interaction between spouses. Understanding the meanings attributed to given situations by both wife and husband is crucial to understanding the development of violent reactions, and will be considered in the discussion of the theories of causation.

In summary, it is quite evident that there is controversy and diversity of opinion about the definition of wife abuse and the way it should be assessed. Instruments such as the Conflict Tactics Scales are helpful for research and for discriminating between various expressions of violence. It must be kept in mind that, however "minor" a slap or shove may be relative to other acts of violence, it is intolerable in the marriage relationship just as it is in other relationships. Just as there is controversy concerning the definition of wife battering, so there is debate over what causes this type of violence. Four major approaches to the understanding of the etiology of wife battering will be considered.

Theories of Causation

The present approach to the understanding of wife abuse is based on the framework provided by Belsky (1980) in his "ecological" treatment of child abuse. He conceived of child abuse as a multiply determined socio-psychological phenomenon. Studies have found a wide variety of factors related to child abuse, which he organized into four sets of

factors also applicable to wife battering. The first, ontogenic factors, focuses on the effect of individual characteristics of the husband and the wife, such as their individual pathology. The second, the microsystem, considers how characteristics of the family system may contribute to wife battering. The third and fourth approaches, the exosystem and macrosystem perspectives, emphasize broader socio-cultural issues. The exosystem approach deals with external factors directly impinging on the couple and their social network. Finally, the macrosystem stresses cultural influences, primarily sexism, as a root cause of wife battering. The articles used in the present review were chosen on the basis of a computer search for research into wife battering during the past ten years. The articles most relevant for the emphasis of this paper were selected, and often-cited studies of previous years articles were also explored. While most of the research in the field of wife battering uses a theoretical or qualitative approach in their analysis of the problem, some researchers do employ more empirical, quantitative methodology. The present review reflects the preponderance of the former type of approach.

Ontogenic Factors

Early work in the area of wife battering identified personality traits in the woman as the cause of her abuse. Specifically, it was held that women are inherently masochistic, and hence, consciously or unconsciously bring about their abuse or do nothing to prevent it. Rooted in Freud's belief that masochism is a "normal expression of feminine nature" (Freud, 1924), early psychoanalytic views held that marital violence is precipitated by the woman who has an unconscious need to be beaten, and that this need is related to sexual pleasure.

Feminine masochism was held to be based on erotogenic masochism, which resulted from the fusion of the death instinct and libido. Freud cited women's supposed "preference for passive behavior" and asserted that "The suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed upon them socially favors the development of powerful masochistic impulses" and concluded that "masochism is truly feminine" (1933, pp. 115-116). He acknowledged the sociocultural influences on women, but the bulk of his theories showed that he really believed masochism to be biologically determined, essential to femaleness.

Others elaborated upon Freud's work (e.g., Deutsch, 1944; Snell, Rosenwald & Robey, 1964). It was argued that masochism is the woman's "anatomical destiny" and the "ultimate development of femininity" (Deutsch, p. 274). It was believed that when the oedipal-age female child recognizes her "organ inferiority" (i.e., lack of a penis, the active organ as opposed to the female's passive organ), active sadistic phallic tendencies are renounced accompanied by a masochistic wish to be castrated by the father. "The first libidinal reaction to the father was masochistic; the fantasied sadistic, rapelike assault and the narcissistic loss were compensated by the desired acquisition of a baby. Parturition was ultimately accompanied by pleasure in pain" (Maleson, 1984, p. 344). In order for procreation to continue, functions involving pain, such as intercourse, menstruation and birth must be endowed with pleasure. The connection becomes so close that sexual pleasure depends upon pain, causing female sexuality and the woman's whole personality to take on a masochistic character. The masochism that results in toleration of abusive behavior was considered an

intensification of normal feminine psychology. Women are not aware that they provoke the masochistic situation or bear with it "because of—not in spite of—the suffering it brings them" (Deutsch, p. 276). Regarding the literary example of a woman who, having recovered from a violent beating by her partner, returns to him, Deutsch says she was "enslaved by her masochism, the strongest of all forms of love" (p. 269). Deutsch denied the contention (Horney, 1967) that she believed women want to be raped, violated, and humiliated. She asserted that masochism is fundamental in women's functioning, but women need to "govern" their masochism and "steer it in the right paths" to protect themselves from violence (p. 278, note 13). In addition to the belief that masochism causes women to provoke abusive behavior from their mates, it was held by many that men were provoked beyond toleration by their wives' shrewish, nagging belittling behavior (Schultz, 1960; Snell et al., 1964).

It has been observed that the classical view of women's masochism did not distinguish between suffering sought and suffering endured, between the goal, for example, of motherhood and the goal of labor pains (Blum, 1977, p. 178). Later analytic thinkers began to question earlier assumptions, including female masochism, penis envy, et cetera. Although some women do experience masochistic satisfaction in female sexual functioning, masochism is not held to be inherently female. The views held by earlier analysts were based on data from psychologically unhealthy women and on women in one specific culture, resulting in unsupportable generalizations from limited information (Horney, 1967). Women can become afraid of their hostile impulses and prefer suffering to aggression, but this is not normal nor inevitable. Female biological

functions do not inherently require masochistic reactions. However, if for other reasons masochistic dynamics are present, these biological functions can serve as masochistic gratifications.

More recent views have moved away from the concepts of drives, instincts and female masochism, while retaining the view that masochistic dynamics can play a part, but not necessarily the only part in wife abuse. The man's dynamics have also received more attention. There has been a growing realization of the importance of object relations, the significance of reality and the influence of socio-cultural factors, particularly among theorists of the object relations school. Transference of early object relations onto the marriage situation is crucial to the dynamic view of marriage and marital violence. Difficulty in separation-individuation, whether due to excessive clinging/overprotectiveness or to premature pulling/pushing away from symbiotic closeness results in introjects which are unhealthy, characterized by infantile dependence or defenses against it along with narcissistic needs, grandiosity and rage. The child's sense of self becomes contaminated by ambivalence between the desire for and fear of autonomy and dependence. Conflicts revolve around:

> 1) a sense of inadequacy or reactive hyperadequacy; 2) the related ambivalence-embedded conflicts which reflect themselves in the polarities of victimization and aggression; and 3) failures of differentiation of self and of the stabilization of inner structures and their related functions (both of ego and superego) which ultimately compromise adult functioning and place impediments in the establishing and maintaining of a secure sense of identity. (Meissner, 1978, p. 37)

The development of certain pathogenic introject configurations, such as the "victim-introject" and the "aggressor-introject," and the concomitant narcissistic reactions of inferiority or grandiosity are of

particular importance. While either males or females can develop either of these types or psychic organization, socialization fosters the "victim" role for women and the "aggressor" role for men. The sense of self built around these organizations is fragile and susceptible to regression and fragmentation, and in significant relationships, particularly under stress, there is a tendency to project aspects of the pathogenic introjects on the significant other. When sense of self is fragmented and distorted there is a tendency to try to find gratification in the marriage for infantile needs; there is an attempt to "gain 'self' at the expense of the other" (Meissner, p. 47, quotes in the original). In other words, wife battering is "the attempt to regain, through the use of emotional and physical force, something that has been lost. What has been lost is directly traceable to the self of the violent person" (Denzin, 1984, p. 488, emphasis in original).

Other researchers and observers have emphasized the application of psychodynamic theory to wife beating (Blum, 1977; Bowlby, 1986; Lion, 1977; Schultz, 1960; Shainess, 1977), particularly the intensity and distortion of their dependency needs. "Complex, interlocking, hostile dependencies between the two partners" which escalate the normal, non-abusive conflict evident in healthy marriages to physical blows have been cited in abusive couples due to the intensity of the emotional bonds and the crucial self issues at stake (Lion, p. 127). If attachment behavior, which is normal throughout the entire life span, is distorted and exaggerated it can contribute to marital abuse (Bowlby, 1984). As children, abusive men have received harsh, unsympathetic treatment, including battering, have observed frequent violent parental arguments, and consequently felt angry, insecure and despairing (Bowlby,

1986). A case study (Schultz, 1960) of several men in custody for severe wife assault found that these men transferred their unmet emotional needs, especially that for dependency, from their mothers to their wives. They had received extremely severe punishment as children, little emotional nurturance and had to control their anger and aggression to prevent rejection. Submission to maternal authority could being them some affection. They identified with the mother-aggressor and internalized her values, agreeing with her that they were "bad." In marriage, these men experienced a conflict between hostility toward their wives and dependency upon them. When gratification of their dependency was threatened, rigid control over their hostility broke down (Schultz, 1960). In addition to having unresolved dependency needs, studies have found abusive husbands to be less assertive than non-abusers (Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Telch & Lindquist, 1984), low in self-esteem (Goldstein & Rosenbaum, 1985; Telch & Lindquist, 1984; Walker, 1979, 1983), lacking in effective coping skills (Finn, 1985; Walker, 1979, 1983; Weitzman & Dreen, 1982), pathologically jealous (Gayford, 1975; Hilberman, 1980; Scott, 1974; Walker, 1979, 1983), passive-aggressive, paranoid and sadistic and unable to tolerate frustration or delay gratification (Shainess, 1977; Walker, 1979, 1983), characterized by explosive rage syndrome (Elliot, 1977), and psychotic or "apparently stable" people under tremendous strain (Faulk, 1977).

Pathological dependence has been observed among abused wives as well as among their abusers. Women as well as men "pick mates responsive to their own unrecognized neurotic needs" (Shainess, 1977, p. 114) and replicate the dynamics of their families of origin in their marriages (Hanks & Rosenbaum, 1977). Some wives unconsciously choose

mates and tolerate their abuse because doing so is one way to avoid the responsibility of having to make one's own decisions. In an unhealthy way, it is comforting to have someone else make your decisions (Lion, 1977, p. 131). This dependence can be seen in a number of rationalizations that abused women have been found to hold in common (Ferraro & Johnson, 1983). Battered wives hold to the "salvation ethic." They feel a need to serve others, especially their husbands, whom they see as sick and needing their help. These women perceive the battering as beyond their own control and beyond the control of the batterer. Instead they blame some outside force (alcohol, work pressures, etc.) for his behavior. They deny the severity of the injury, defining it as normal, tolerable ("all men blow off a little steam from time to time"). Further rationalizations include taking responsibility from the husband and blaming themselves for the abuse ("I should have known what he wanted," "I should be a better wife," "I shouldn't have yelled at him") and denial of practical and emotional options (e.g., not taking advantage of shelters, believing that only her husband can meet her needs for intimacy and companionship and that if she leaves him, she is doomed to a life of loneliness with which she cannot cope). A final rationalization is the "appeal to higher loyalties." Distortion of the Christian message can encourage a woman to tolerate abuse, thinking she is obeying God. When used as a strategy to cope with battering, commitment to a higher ideal can overshadow the commonplace though painful reality of violence.

In contrast to those of the psychoanalytic/psychodynamic orientation, others notice common characteristics among abused women, but maintain that "there are no specific personality traits which would

suggest a victim-prone personality for the women, although there may be an identifiable violence prone personality for the men" (Walker, 1983, p. 32). In her 1979 work, Walker derived a compilation of characteristics of abused wives and their batterers which she attributed to sex role socialization. She did not make it clear how the characteristics of women which are determined by sex role socialization are not personality factors, whereas those of men are. It appears that Walker tried to avoid the "blame the victim" mentality that characterized earlier attempts to identify personality factors associated with victims of wife abuse. Although she did not agree that there is a "victim prone" personality, her findings actually do relate to personality variables of the individual spouses, and for that reason, Walker's ideas will be considered "ontogenic factors." Walker's earlier study was based on 120 detailed self-report accounts and over 300 fragments of accounts of battered women in the United States and England. She focused on common experiences among the abused women and found that the women in her sample (a) had low self esteem and (b) tended to believe the myths about battering relationships. For example, battered women believe that drinking causes battering, that they and their batterers are crazy, that the police can protect them, and that they deserve to be beaten. (c) Further, they were traditionalists about the home, strongly believing in family unity and the prescribed feminine sex role stereotype, (d) accepted responsibility for the batterer's actions, (e) suffered from guilt, yet denied the terror and anger they felt, (f) presented a passive face to the world but had the strength to manipulate their environment enough to prevent further violence and being killed, (g) had severe stress reactions, with physiological

complaints, (h) used sex as a way to establish intimacy, and (i) believed that no one would be able to help them resolve their predicament except themselves.

In her 1983 study Walker concluded that no victim personality emerged for women, but an abusive personality did emerge for men. Violence was initiated by the abusers because of a learned inability to control their behavior when angry. Although she did not refer to personality traits for the wives, Walker did discuss what she called "susceptibility factors." Contrary to expectation, the women in this study expressed more liberal than traditional views of themselves in terms of sex roles, though they perceived their husbands as more traditional. The discrepancy causes conflict and the women are forced to behave in a more traditional way. Other factors contributing to a woman's susceptibility to wife abuse included early and repeated sexual molestation and assault (48%), a high level of violence by members of her childhood family (67%), perception of critical or uncontrollable events in childhood (no statistics provided) and experiencing other conditions that increase the possibility of depression (not specified or supported with statistics). Walker seemed to ignore the unavoidable awareness that these childhood experiences have an effect on the personality of the child, effects that are evident in the adult personality.

Walker attempted to determine if learned helplessness from childhood is a determinant of learned helplessness in the battering relationship and if either of these is a determinant of a woman's current state. She found that there was essentially no relationship between helplessness learned in childhood and helplessness that

developed in the current relationship: Childhood experiences in this sample of women appeared not to cause them to be more or less vulnerable in battering relationships. Learned helplessness can develop at any time. Her cycle of violence theory notwithstanding, Walker argued that "Our data confirm that domestic violence does not come from the interaction of partners in the relationship nor from irritating personality traits of the battered women, but rather from the batterer's learned behavioral responses" (Walker, 1983, p. 37). In spite of her claim that battered women manifest no distinct personality variables, her own data did not confirm such a conclusion, and she appeared to selectively ignore other data: She rejected the "irritating personality traits" theory, but seemed unaware that other personality factors may influence the cycle of violence. One does not have to believe that women nag their husbands into violence to accept that personality affects the process. She also ignored data (including some of her own observations) indicating that an interplay of action between the husband and wife also influences the process.

In summary, ontogenic approaches focus on the pathology of the individual husband and/or wife in battering relationships. Developmental failures, deprivation, unhealthy modeling or trauma in the individual's family of origin which result in the development of unhealthy personality traits are seen as the main causes of battering in the ontogenic perspective. In the opinion of this writer, such an emphasis is warranted: The "bottom line" is individual distortion. However, the mistake that those who research wife battering from an exclusively ontogenic basis make is limiting their understanding of wife abuse to personality factors and not considering the other factors which

influence its development, such as the impact of the marital system qua system on the origin of violence. Microsystem approaches take just that perspective in their focus on the contributions of both husband and wife to the marital system that erupts into violence.

The Microsystem

In contrast to views that hold that the individual psychopathology of the husband or wife or both are responsible for the battering, other investigators have focused on inter-personal factors within the marital relationship that tend to lead to marital violence. The current review of microsystem research will include research that has emphasized systems-oriented approaches as well as those that view the etiology of violence from a social psychology perspective. Such perspectives look for causes of abuse in the interaction within the marital unit, not in the individual or in the community or larger cultural context (Cook & Frantz-Cook, 1984; Denzin, 1984; Dutton & Painter, 1983; Finn, 1985; Goode, 1971; Hall, 1985; Hepburn, 1973; Hilberman, 1980; Hornung, McCullough & Sugimoto, 1981; Romero, 1985; Straus, 1973; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980; Walker, 1979; Weitzman & Dreen, 1982).

Microsystem approaches are generally based on one or more of the following assumptions: (a) neither abusive husbands nor their wives are more pathological than are non-abusive couples (Straus, 1977); (b) wife abuse occurs in marital systems characterized by certain relationship structures and by repetitive sequences of interaction between husband and wife (Bograd, 1984; Denzin, 1984; Hall, 1985; Hepburn, 1973; Walter, 1979); (c) both husband and wife have a part in perpetuating the violence (Cook & Cook, 1984; Denzin, 1984; Goode, 1971; Weitzman & Dreen, 1982); and (d) domestic violence can facilitate the maintenance

of the marital system (Bograd, 1984; Denzin, 1984). The emphasis is on the interaction within the system and not on the pathology of either or both individuals.

The particular meaning events have for husbands and wives and the unique ways they construct reality are significant themes in some microsystem analyses of marital violence (Denzin, 1984; Gelles & Straus, 1978; Hall, 1985, Hepburn, 1973). A "symbolic interactionist" perspective is adopted by some who focus on subjective rather than objective factors. Rather than quantifying acts of violence, the symbolic interactionist approach seeks to uncover the meanings each element of the relationship has for husband and wife. This perspective examines how the meanings (including self-perception, meanings attached to friendship, employment, sex, and cleanliness) develop through interactions between individuals, how they come to be shared or uniquely held, how these meanings persist or change, and on the consequence of the meanings in a given situation. The couple is seen to be actively participating in the construction of their reality. Marital violence is considered a joint event in which the wife and husband interact with each other on the basis of meanings they hold regarding past experiences, characteristics of current situations and their self concept. For example, if a husband interprets his wife having lunch with a friend or working outside the home as evidence of her lack of love for him, he will be more likely to become angry with her and is at higher risk for becoming violent. The interpretation a woman makes of her husband's violence influences how she will respond. If she interprets the act as evidence of his love (albeit jealous love), as a result of the great stress he is under ("not the real him"), as an

accident ("He didn't mean to hit me that hard."), or in a similar way, she will be less likely to take action to prevent future abuse. The crucial task is to understand what these individual meanings are. The symbolic interactionist perspective concerns itself with the process involved in the social perception of violence including how marital dynamics and the situation influence the victim's perception of the violent actions.

One view of the cyclical nature of wife abuse that fits with a symbolic interactionist perspective has presented wife battering as a conflict-generating, alienating process of "negative symbolic interaction" (Denzin, 1984). Basing his observations on a synthesis of previous research, Denzin held that the first stage of wife battering begins with denial of the violence. The wife views the incident as an isolated, insignificant event, takes responsibility for her husband's action and prefers to forget about it. In stage 2, the husband experiences some pleasure or satisfaction by controlling his wife. In stage 3, the violence increases and persists, resulting in an increase in the wife's hostility and a consequent increase in her husband's hostility. Misunderstandings continue to grow in stage 4 as the husband denies responsibility and blames his wife. She lies to herself, telling herself that the abuse was accidental. Misunderstandings deepen into suspicion of sexual infidelity on both parts (stage 5). In the sixth stage, mutual hatred results in increased violence, and increased instability continues until the relationship either collapses or is altered by events from the outside, such as a call to military service, or illness. Factors affecting the instability of the marriage include cultural constraints on or tolerance of violent behavior.

Violence continues to alienate the couple as the violence produces distortions of their self-perceptions and destroys their ability to empathize with one another. The instability leads to either the collapse of the system (stage 7) or continuing in a state of recurring violence (stage 8) because their meaning systems do not allow them to see any other alternatives. The wife responds to the husband's increasing violence with either passivity or retaliation and loses either way. If she responds passively, she reinforces his violence and it continues. If she retaliates, he responds with more violence.

Microanalysis of interacting meanings that characterize key turning points in the development of a violent marital episode have been described (Hall, 1985; Hepburn, 1973). The focus here is on the violation of relational rules that are perceived as threats to the identities of the participant, on the subsequent attempts to recover from these threats, and on the implementation of threat-reducing tactics which precede and facilitate the violence. Hall's study was based on 87 accounts of violence derived from interviews with 23 women who were residents at shelters for abused women and their children in rural Appalachia. The women were self-referred to the shelter and volunteered for the study. The questionnaire used during the interview gathered information concerning socio-economic status, religious affiliation, drinking behavior, violence in families of origin, and violence in the current relationship, with particular emphasis on events leading up to the violence, events during and after the violence, and the setting in which the violence occurred. The researcher chose qualitative materials rather than quantitative materials as an empirical basis for the study because quantitative approaches "fail to observe the entire

interpretative side of the interactive process, and in doing so, can never adequately reveal its nature" (Hall, 1985, p. 59). Hall (1985) stated that the "grounded theory" method was used to analyze the data. This method is concerned with the generation of theories of social action from data that are systematically and simultaneously collected and analyzed. As the data are analyzed and similarities and differences are discovered between various aspects of the data, categories with similar properties emerge. At the point where the "similar properties" that emerged from Hall's data began to resemble the model proposed by Hepburn (Hall, 1985, p. 89), Hall adopted the Hepburn model as her basic theory and used the results of her study to expand this model (Hall, 1985, p. 212). See Figures 3 and 4.

Certain conditions general to the relationship and certain situations specific to a given interaction increase a husband's vulnerability to identity threat. (Situational variables will be considered under "Exosystem" factors below.) It has been observed (Hornung, McCullough & Sugimoto, 1981) that atypical combinations of status characteristics (such as a wife or husband having a job for which they have little education, in comparison to other people in the same position) influence marital violence because they induce the participants to feel deprivation, inequity and disadvantage in relationship to the other. It is not a matter of lack of similarity per se that is a problem. For example, Hornung et al. found no great risk of violence in a couple in which husband has a higher status job and higher educational attainment than the wife. They found that a man who has achieved an occupational position higher than most other men with his education is less likely to engage in violence toward his

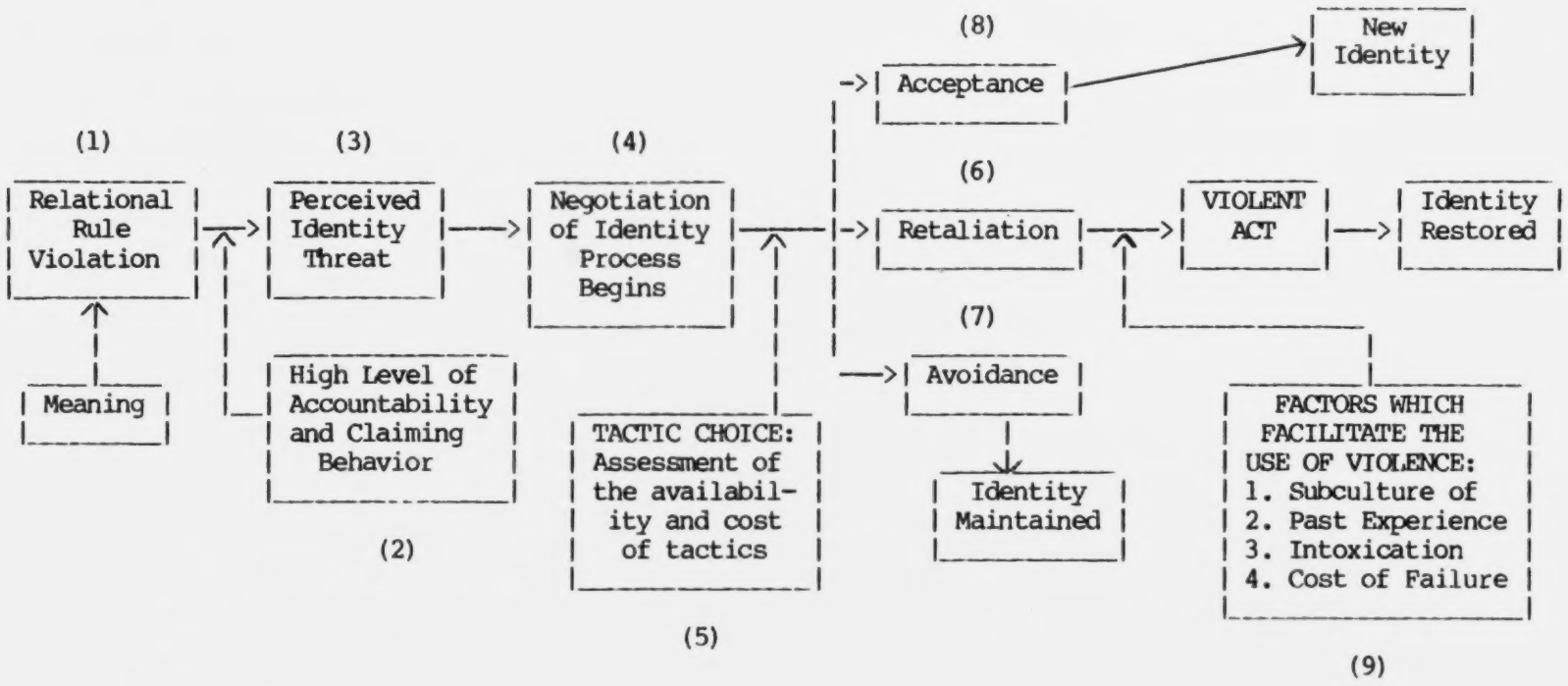


Figure 3. The Hepburn model of interpersonal violence.

Note. From The Violent Marital Episode: Discovering Its Nature and Processes (p. 89) by Hall, 1985.

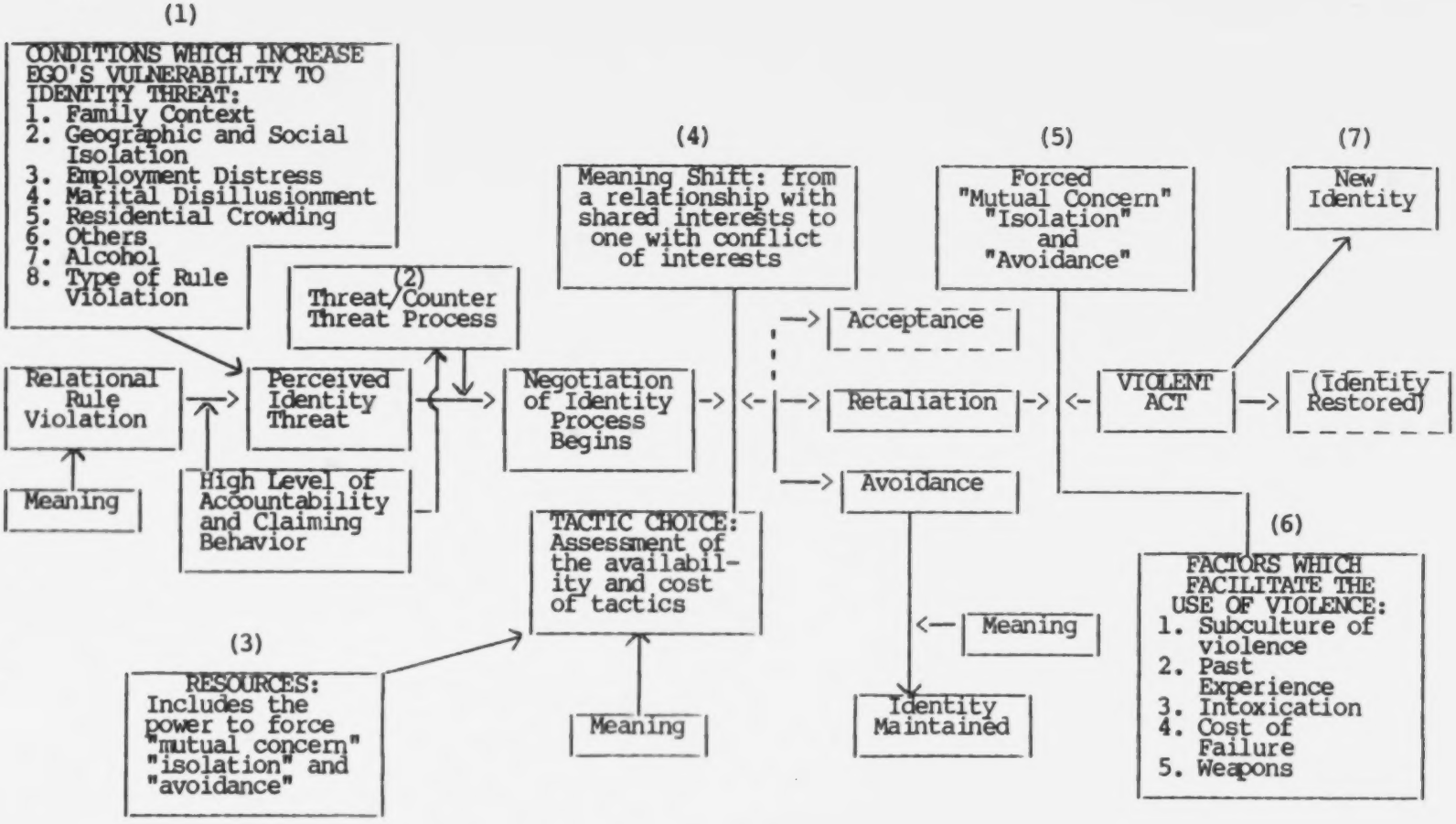


Figure 4. Hall's modification of the Hepburn model.

Note. From The Violent Marital Episode: Discovering Its Nature and Processes (p. 212) by Hall, 1985.

wife, but when the wife has a position which is higher than most others with her education, she is at greater risk of battering from her husband. The conclusions Hornung et al. drew are interesting and warrant further investigation, but their study is limited by occasional inappropriate use of statistics as when, in trying to support their contention that women who are "education low" for their job are at greater risk for violence, they state that such women are ".96 times as likely to be in marriages involving physical aggression" (p. 688). Such a statistic actually suggests that these women are less likely to be in marriages involving physical aggression. They did go on to state that these women are also three times more likely to be in marriages in which there has been at least one act of life-threatening violence during the year. This statistic lends more support to their conclusion. Similar studies with more careful attention to the interpretation of findings are warranted.

If a husband feels himself unable to attain his goals through other means, he may turn to violence to accomplish his ends. Violent episodes frequently occur in the context of arguments regarding the nature and future of the relationship: whether or not to live together, marry, separate, or get back together. The presence of a double standard of fidelity, the issue of the husband's claim to authority, and engaging in sexual activity are other frequent areas of conflict (Hall, 1985). Reliance on rigid relational rules and conflicts over the use of power have been cited as characteristics of abusive couples. The struggle is for control over relationship rules. Battles for control have been found to center in six control themes: (a) distance/intimacy; (b) jealousy and loyalty; (c) dependence/independence;

(d) rejection/unconditional acceptance; (e) adequacy/inadequacy, and (f) control, power/powerlessness (Weitzman & Dreen, 1982). Violence wards off challenges to the control concerns and their threat to the individual's identity. It can be seen that a detailed analysis of the interactions between husband and wife leading up to a violent incident can yield some of the same insights as a more psychodynamic approach, particularly in regard to unresolved dependency needs and inadequate separation-individuation.

A typical sequence might occur as follows (Hall, 1985): A husband experiences a threat to his identity (wife wants to work) and attempts to salvage his identity by issuing a counter threat (orders his wife to stay home, tells her she is too stupid to work or accuses her of infidelity) to reassert his confidence in his "male authority." If the wife does not recognize the threat to his identity, or refuses to help (continues working or criticizes him), his identity is further threatened. He expects his wife to be his role support, to act as an identity-restoring resource, and to protect his interests. When she acts in a way that he perceives as counter to his interests, his identity is threatened. The next stage is that of tactic choice. Spouses can respond to an identity threat with avoidance, acceptance or retaliation. In avoidance, spouses stay away from the one who issued the threat. However, this is not always practical or possible. (See discussion of social isolation under "Exosystem" below.) Acceptance involves acceptance of the modification of one's identity implied by the identity threat (e.g., that he doesn't really have control over his wife). If the costs of avoidance and acceptance are too high or the rewards of retaliation are higher, he will resort to violence. The

choice of violence is influenced by a subculture that tolerates violence ("macho" image for men, the reluctance of judicial system to prosecute, and the "duty" of a woman to "stand by her man" and "take the bad with the good"). Opting for violence is also influenced by past experience of violence (witnessing or experiencing violence in childhood), intoxication (wives and husbands blame the alcohol for the violence and not the man who drank it) and the presence of others. An audience at times serves as an explicit or implicit encouragement for a man to beat his wife. At times an audience may encourage the husband to beat his wife, and at other times the threat to the husband's identity may feel more intense because it happened in front of others, and, feeling shamed publicly, he wants to reclaim his authority publicly. This model sheds light on the significance of threats to identity which trigger violence and on the importance of the meaning of relationship factors to the couple. However, it is limited by a lack of awareness of personality variables. It is helpful to know that a husband feels threatened by his wife going shopping without him and that his anger and violence proceeds from his fear of losing her. However, the almost exclusive focus on the wife's actions that threaten the husband could imply that the solution is for the wife to learn her husband's meaning system and stop doing things which he finds threatening. Such a conclusion would be unfortunate. The husband who flies into a jealous rage because his wife spends time with a female friend, has a job, or goes to school has serious psychological problems. The problem is not that his wife did something that threatened him, but that his self-esteem is so low that he would be threatened by such things.

Some see the particular kinds of interactions engaged in by abusive couples as generating a condition of "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1975; Walker, 1979) or "traumatic bonding" (Dutton & Painter, 1983; Hilberman, 1980; Martin, 1979; Romero, 1985). Walter (1979) bases her analyses of the learned helplessness that characterizes abused wives on her study of women in shelters. Data were collected through interviews with abused women and from reports from abused women. She does not provide statistics for her theories, but gives a description of an overall pattern she observed in abusive marriages. The abusive cycle begins with a tension-building phase of "minor" incidents during which the wife tries to calm the batterer and to meet his needs through compliance and taking the blame for his outbursts, but as the abuse continues, she begins to develop the belief that she is powerless to stop the rest of the cycle and helpless to protect herself. It has been observed (Finn, 1985) that abused women are less likely to use active problem-solving strategies than non-abused women and more likely to rely upon the passive techniques that result in added stress through lack of resolution of existing problems. There is no proof in Walker's 1979 study that the battering promoted the poor coping skills rather than that women with poor coping skills wind up in marriages that turn out to be abusive. Other studies (primarily based on case study and qualitative analysis), however, also have cited a similar response of learned helplessness by women (Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978; Martin, 1979; Dutton & Painter, 1983; Hilberman, 1980; Romero, 1985). The wife's compliance appears to legitimize to the husband his use of violence and reinforces him for doing so. This first stage may last from weeks to years, according to Walker. The second stage involves the acute

battering incident. Both husband and wife feel out of control and the husband justifies his actions. After the battering has happened several times, the woman may provoke an incident, not because of masochism, but because she knows it is imminent and feels that though she cannot avoid or prevent it, at least she can influence when it will happen. Reactions include denial, shock and the belief that no one can help her. This stage usually lasts from 2-24 hours. During the third stage, the batterer displays remorse, guilt, and acts in lavishly loving ways, apologizing, giving gifts, promising that it will never happen again. He believes it and she convinces herself that he will be able to control himself. Symbiotic attachment is cemented during this time: calm prevails and the relationship feels like "the way it used to be." Although this is the most difficult period for a woman to leave her abusive husband, many do, and for some this is the time when repressed rage is expressed in violent retaliation by the wife.

Similar to the concept that learned helplessness contributes to the perpetuation of the battering cycle is the theory of "traumatic bonding." The post-trauma experience of intense affective states has been observed among hostages, abused children and cult members as well as among battered wives (Dutton & Painter, 1983; Hilberman, 1980; Romero, 1985). The traumatically-formed attachments are evident in expressions of affection for their captor/abuser, engaging in sexual relations with them, loyalty to them and identification with them. The imbalance of power and the intermittent character of the abuse contribute to traumatic bonding. The traumatized individual has low self esteem because of her low power position and through "identification with the aggressor" increases her feelings of power.

Not only does the abused wife feel dependent upon her husband, but he is dependent upon her, evident in his desperate attempts to control her. The periodic nature of the abuse, like any intermittent reinforcement, produces persistent patterns of behavior. When the abuse is varied with calm or affectionate treatment, traumatic bonding is most likely to occur. The increased arousal prior to the violence and the good feeling during the calm phase are extremely reinforcing. Other factors that contribute to the bonding are the woman's belief that the battering will happen again unless she does something to stop it (such as being a better wife and anticipating what he wants) or that she deserves the abuse.

The systemic theory that seems to present the most comprehensive system of potential factors contributing to wife abuse is the General Systems theory proposed by Straus (1973). Straus has seen the family as a purposive, goal-seeking, adaptive social system. The system, rather than the individual, produces the violence. Certain types of "positive feedback" within the system create an upward spiral of violence, and "negative feedback" can maintain or reduce the amount of violence. Like other microsystem analyses, Straus' model emphasized the interaction between the participants. Moreover, he stressed the impact, interplay, change and movement between various aspects of the marital system as they move toward or away from violence. His improvement over the Hepburn/Hall model is that in addition to analyzing the micro units of interaction in a given violent incident, he is more inclusive and thorough and shows much more awareness of individual pathology, although he does not emphasize those factors. The difficulty with Straus' theory, as with all those lacking concrete empirical results is that no

plausible influence is ever ruled out, and relative degrees of influence are not determined. Nonetheless, Straus' model may serve as a guide to future research, providing direction in areas of potentially fruitful investigation.

Systems approaches emphasizing that both husband and wife have a part in the violence have been criticized (Bograd, 1984; Breines & Gordon, 1983; Loseke & Cahill, 1984). The problem with systemic formulations, it is said, is that they "contain subtle but pernicious biases that inadvertently sanction violence against women or that deflect attention away from the social conditions that may engender battering" (Bograd, p. 560), and "obscure the actual history of the feminist 'discovery' of violence against women and discourage analyses of the problem from a context of male supremacy" (Breines & Gordon, p. 508). Battering is minimized by presenting it as simply a symptom of other, "real" problems in the relationship. Transactional descriptions wind up implicating the woman, usually as a nag, or as wounding the fragile ego of her husband. Systems language itself ("the battering system," for example) hides the gender-specific nature of wife-battering and ignores the power differential between husbands and wives. These criticisms may apply to certain systems approaches. However, an approach that seeks to understand all the variables in a marital relationship that has become violent does not necessarily relieve the husband in any way of responsibility for his actions. A systems approach can pay attention to interactional sequences and still hold a man accountable for his own behavior and call attention to needs for social reform and assistance for abused women.

In summary, the microsystem approaches focus attention on the unhealthy interactions into which some couples become locked, resulting in periodic violence. Neither the husband nor the wife considered as individuals is responsible for wife battering, but both together in the marital system contribute to the development of violence. An important contribution this approach makes is the emphasis on understanding the way both husband and wife construe the various aspects of their relationship and the events and experiences they share. Husband and wife must understand what significance the other attaches to having a job (or being unemployed), visiting with friends, drinking or being late for an appointment. Both must understand the tacit, assumed "rules" of the relationship, which, when violated, result in insult, threaten personal security and can contribute to violent reactions. Deliberate or unconscious actions on the part of husband and wife act as triggers to the escalation of hostility. These patterns of interactions must be brought into the couples' awareness, understood, and new, healthier patterns must be developed. The drawback to this approach is that it can, though it need not, be used to relieve the husband of ultimate responsibility for his behavior and can focus on external behavior patterns without touching upon deep-seated personality variables which, if not treated, will provoke continued difficulty in the marital relationship.

Whereas some researchers focus on intrapsychic factors and others emphasize intra-systemic factors, still others have concentrated on the extra-systemic or "Exosystem" influences on the development of wife battering. These influences will be examined below.

The Exosystem

In Belsky's model, the exosystem refers to the "world of work and the neighborhood" (p. 327). Here also, work and neighborhood contribute to the exosystem. Whereas in Belsky's model, children are a part of the "microsystem," here, because they are external to the marital dyad, they are considered "exosystem" factors. While some consider the relationship itself a stressor, the exosystem approach deals primarily with external stressors that impinge upon the marital dyad, such as alcohol, unemployment, finances, illness, isolation, relatives, and weather (Barling & Rosenbaum, 1986; Finn, 1985; Gelles, 1980; Hall, 1985; Hanks & Rosenbaum, 1977; Hepburn, 1973; Martin, 1976; Michael & Zumpe, 1986; Pizzey, 1974; Scott, 1974; Straus et al., 1980; Telch & Lindquist, 1984; Walker, 1979, 1983).

The use of alcohol has been implicated as a common factor in violent interactions between spouses (Eisenberg & Micklow, 1974; Gayford, 1975; Gelles, 1974; Hall, 1985; Hanks & Rosenbaum, 1977; Hepburn, 1973; Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981; Roy, 1977; Telch & Lindquist, 1984). Alcoholism is more likely in abusive than in non-abusive husbands (Rosenbaum & O'Leary, 1981). Other research has found that both the batterers and their wives reported significantly more drinking problems than did non-abusive couples (Telch & Lindquist, 1984). In a number of studies, large percentages of the cases showed violence occurring in the context of alcohol consumption: 44% (Gelles, 1974); 93% (Hilberman & Munson, 1977/1978); 52% (Gayford, 1975); and, 90% (Roy, 1977). Batterers drink in order to carry out the violence, or to deny responsibility for it (Gelles, 1974; Hall, 1985). The drinking behavior of one or both partners can be a conflictual issue over which violence

breaks out (Hall, 1985; Hanks & Rosenbaum, 1977). Rosenbaum and O'Leary (1981) found significant differences between groups of abused wives in individual treatment, couples in conjoint treatment, satisfactorily married couples and non-violent discordant couples in the husbands' scores on the Short Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test. The husbands of wives seen individually scored significantly higher on this measure than did the other groups, which did not differ from one another. One might conclude that the more prevalent the drinking behavior, the less committed was the husband to working through marital problems (hence, the wives came to treatment alone), or that the higher the drinking score, the more severely abusive was the husband, hence the wife chose not to remain in the marriage. Telch and Lindquist (1984) also found that violent couples reported significantly greater drinking problems than did non-violent couples ($p < .001$), and that both wife and husband had problems with drinking to the same degree. Both husband and wife blame the alcohol and excuse the drinker. One violent husband said to his wife, "You're starting to make me hate you . . . . You want me drinking all the time just so I can't control my temper" (Hall, p. 172).

In addition to intoxicants, stress has been considered an extra-systemic influence contributing to the eruption of wife battering. Associations have been made between wife battering and specific stressful situations. The number of children in the home has been related to the stress resulting in marital violence. Contrary to expectation, however, the relationship is not linear: Wife battering increases with each additional child up to six, at which point the rate of violence drops dramatically (Straus et al., 1980). Work stressors demanding personal readjustment by the husband (Barling & Rosenbaum,

1986; Finn, 1985) and unemployment (Prescott & Letko, 1977; Straus et al., 1980) have been related to wife abuse. Other stressors include financial difficulty (Finn, 1985; Prescott & Letko, 1977; Straus et al., 1980); pregnancy (Straus et al., 1980); seasonal factors (Michael & Zumpe, 1986), social isolation (Hall, 1985) and the presence of witnesses to the violence (Hall, 1985; Hepburn, 1973). Geographical location may promote a social isolation that may prevent a wife from avoiding her husband or vice versa. Many abused wives are deliberately restricted by their husbands: Their clothing is padlocked, they have no money, no car keys, they are locked in their houses and threatened if they leave the house, or go anywhere without their husbands. Some husbands actually exacerbate the problem when they attempt to avoid their wives by going to a bar to drink (Hall, 1985; Martin, 1976; Pizzey, 1974; Walker, 1979, 1983). Lack of resources and dependency increase the husband's vulnerability to the identity threat that is said to trigger violent incidents (Hall, 1985; Hepburn, 1973).

Exosystem factors not only influence the husband to resort to violence, but they are also instrumental in keeping the woman in abusive relationships. Geographical isolation (as characterized the rural Appalachian setting of Hall's study), enforced isolation (women who are locked in a room without a telephone, forbidden on threat of a beating to leave the house), lack of money, lack of community resources, and concern for children are the main factors which make it difficult for many women to leave their homes.

In summary, the exosystem approach focuses on factors that impinge upon the couple, causing stress of such a degree that they are unable to handle difficult situations in a healthy way. Instead of talking

through his frustration, the husband resorts to violence, and instead of protecting herself, the wife tolerates the abuse. Empirical evidence as well as common experience shows that increased stress often lowers a person's ability to respond as she or he thinks best. However, not all couples who experience great stress become violent towards each other. The exosystem approach fails to show why some husbands who are burdened by stress beat their wives and why others do not. Again, it seems to this writer that the "bottom line" is within the individual. Both wife battering itself and the obstacles that prevent women from escaping abusive situations are seen by many to be caused by a pervasive sexist attitude toward women. These attitudinal/ideological perspectives are reviewed under "macrosystem" considerations.

The Macrosystem

One segment of the literature has examined wife battering not from the standpoint of individual pathology nor from the perspective of interacting systems, nor as precipitated by impinging stressors, but from the perspective of the ideologies and cultural assumptions that permeate the structures on which society is built. Most of the literature coming from this perspective is theoretical and qualitative, though a few researchers do present quantitative empirical data. Some identify the general acceptance of violence in American culture or in specific American sub-cultures as a primary cause of wife battering (Goode, 1971; Hall, 1985; Hepburn, 1973; Straus, 1976; Straus et al., 1980). The family, like other social systems, is seen to be based on force or threat: "Not only do we use force and threat in order to socialize our children, we also teach them that force is useful, and we do in fact train them in the use of force and violence (Goode, 1971, p.

627). Parental authority is backed up by the threat and use of force, and if parents themselves cannot control their children, they can bring in auxiliary forces, such as the police or social service agencies. Family roles carry a variety of mandates and restrictions, as do roles in larger society and all are backed by force.

Others emphasize a partriarchal, sexist attitude as the underlying cause of violence toward women (Bograd, 1984; Breines & Gordon, 1983; Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978; Martin, 1976; Pagelow, 1985; Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier, 1979; Romero, 1985; Straus, 1976; Walker, 1979, 1983; Ÿllo, 1983, 1984). To treat wife battering in the same context as other forms of violence, such as child abuse, obscures the central issue in violence toward women: a sexist attitude which allows men to view women as inferior, as objects to be controlled and used. Society's support of male supremacy establishes the conditions for wife battering.

Some address sexism in society as one of the causes of wife battering along with other factors such as individual pathology, stress and dysfunctional marital systems (Hall, 1985; Straus, 1973). The macrosystem approach is most clearly seen among those who emphasize sexism in society as the only or the main cause of wife battering. Those who adopt this approach have been divided into the "radical feminists" and the "socialist feminists" (Breines & Gordon, 1983). Basic to the radical feminist approach is the contention that male-female relationships are characterized by an inequal distribution of power based on gender (Bograd, 1984). Men constitute the dominant class and have greater access to material and symbolic resources, Bograd observes, and women are devalued and seen as secondary and inferior. In this type of society, violence is the most obvious way in which men can

control women and is a "feature of the usual and normal functioning of marriage in our society" (p. 563). Radical feminists such as Bograd criticize systems approaches and ontogenic perspectives for having biases against women and for ignoring the sexist context of wife battering. Any attempt to examine the wife's behavior shifts responsibility, it is said, from the batterer to the wife, perpetuating the idea that women are primarily responsible for insuring a peaceful home, and ignores the fact that violence is unacceptable, regardless of what might be wrong with the marriage. The battering itself and the man's responsibility to stop must be primary treatment issues according to this approach. The violence must not be passed over as a mere symptom of underlying dyadic problems, but should be addressed as the most important problem. As noted earlier, the batterer must be held entirely responsible for his behavior. (This does not, in this writer's opinion, preclude assessing how the wife's actions may contribute to the inadequacy of the marriage.)

Wife battering is seen as an attempt to enforce a patriarchal social order (Dobash & Dobash, 1977/1978). In their study with 109 abused women, Dobash and Dobash found that the majority (no statistics were provided) of the men who struck their wives-to-be before marriage did so because of sexual jealousy or in response to the woman's intention to end the relationship. Fifty-nine percent of the men were violent toward their wives by the end of the first year of marriage and 92 percent within the first five years. Violence centered on authority issues. Although the researchers did not provide percentages, they asserted that "Husbands came to feel that their wives should meet their demands immediately and without question no matter how reasonable or

unreasonable" (p. 438). They went on to observe:

> The major sources of contention centered on what might be called 'wifely obligations' and the husband's authority . . . . The fulfillment of these behaviors is not only personally pleasant for him; it is also an outward sign of his "rightful" possession of her, authority over her and ability to control her. In our research, it was the real or perceived challenges to the man's possession, authority and control which most often resulted in the use of violence. (pp. 438-439, emphasis added)

Macrosystem observers have pointed out the cultural norms that both give expression to and serve to reinforce the acceptance of violence toward women. Such acceptance is evident in literature and entertainment. There is the often-told joke, set in varying cultural contexts, about the woman who complains to a friend that her husband no longer loves her. The evidence? "He hasn't bashed me for a fortnight!" Plays, books, movies, letters to Ann Landers (quoted earlier) and other expressions in the media suggest the pervasiveness of society's acceptance of wife battering. An American comedian, only quite recently deceased, used to elicit roars of laughter from his audiences upon shaking a fist in his wife's face and threatening, "One of these days, Alice . . . to the moon!"

The legal system has hesitated to include assaulting one's wife among prosecutable offenses. The doctrine of "spousal immunity" has prevented women from suing their husbands for assault (Straus, 1976). Police are also slow to intervene. A study of 325 battered women who contacted an Indiana County Sheriff's office showed that police there would not arrest for a misdemeanor battery unless they witnessed the incident and were still reluctant to intervene in husband-wife conflict when they had seen the incident (Ford, 1983). They were more likely to arrest for related offenses, such as drunk or disorderly conduct, than for the abuse itself. In the year during which the study was conducted,

between 2/3 and 3/4 of abused women who called the police got no further than talking to the police dispatcher who did not consider the incident serious enough to send an officer. The police were often reluctant to go on domestic calls, and some gave evidence of either agreeing with the violence or believing it should not concern the state. Ford emphasized that for the 325 women in his study, the effectiveness of their suits against their batterers hinged on the judgment call ("discretionary acts") of various officials from police dispatchers to police, judges, and prosecutors. The lack of uniform policies, carelessness in processing complaints and direct discouragement from pursuing action hindered many women from effectively prosecuting the men who abused them. Having initiated legal action, there was less than one chance in three that the batterer would be arrested within one month of the time the woman contacted the prosecutor's office, and only a 62% chance of arrest within 6 months. Of the 325 women, 60% had their cases put "on hold," and of those, only 32% returned to sign an affidavit. Ford asserted, "The criminal justice system had the effect of wearing down the victim-witness long before the defendant was due to stand trial" (p. 473). Straus echoed these observations when he stated, "The failure to invoke criminal penalties reflects the historical continuities in the cultural norms which make the marriage license a hitting license" (1976, p. 60). It has been said that police hesitate to intervene because women often turn their anger on the officers or drop charges once they are made. One of the reasons for this is that women often feel, with good reason, that nothing will be done to the husband anyway, so why should they take the chance of angering him further or going to the trouble to see through a complaint. Several authors have cited similar

examples of police who are called to intervene in a wife beating incident who merely walk the husband around the block, encouraging him to calm down and then release him, whereupon the husband continues the beating with added violence.

The male-dominant structure of society and of the family foster marital violence in a number of ways which are adequately summarized by Straus (1976). (a) Wife battering constitutes a defense of male authority. Feeling inferior in personal resources to their wives, some men resort to violence to maintain a superior power position in the family. (b) A "compulsive masculinity" may contribute to a man's perspective of women as inferior and as the source of all of his problems. (c) The sexist economic and occupational structure of society does not allow many alternatives to women. Most, therefore, remain economically dependent on their husbands. (d) A gender-based division of labor causes the burden of child care to remain with women, further hindering their entrance into the job market. (e) The idea that children cannot be brought up by one parent and society's ostracism of the single parent cause women to delay leaving abusive husbands. (f) Society's elevation of the wife and mother role above all other roles a woman can have makes it difficult for a woman to leave an abusive situation. (g) Society fosters negative self images in women, disdaining women who seek to achieve goals outside the home as unfeminine. (h) The assumption that the husband is "head of the home" relegates women to a child-like status and gives her husband rights over her. (i) The male orientation of the criminal justice system is insensitive to the issue of wife battering, and slow to intervene to assist abused wives. In sum, radical feminists hold that pervasive,

entrenched sexism and anti-women biases on all levels of society condone and foster wife battering.

The "socialist feminists" (Stark, Flitcraft & Frazier, 1979) have viewed the medical profession and all "helping professions" as actually making it more difficult for women to escape abusive situations by blaming the women. They cited evidence of emergency room staff laughing at abused women who return to the medical facility for treatment of battering several times. Emergency room staff dispose of wife battering as either a medical problem, and prescribe pain medication and patch wounds, or as a psychiatric problem of the victim. However, Stark et al. did not see the "patriarchy" of the medical profession as the main culprit. They argued,

> The convergence of medical care and forms of suffering such as battering has little to do with individual physician behavior, however, even when it is clearly motivated by sexism. For in order to reaffirm its own peculiar brand of mystification, medicine as a whole must align its structure, procedures and ideology with the overall structure of domination in bourgeois society. (p. 471)

The authors contended that the feminists (here, "radical feminists;" Stark et al. do not classify themselves as feminists) mistakenly equate "society-as-a-whole" with "patriarchy" and therefore do not take notice of important differences between specific patriarchal forms and the political economy in which they are embedded. The primary cause of battering, they maintain, is not simply sexism, but the batterer's loss of control over the woman's labor power, due to her entrance into the job market. They noted that three modern periods in which battering has been widely noted, the 1830s and 1840s, the late 19th century, and the 1960s and 1970s, have been times during which there have been shifts in family power due to women working outside the home and to women's

growing political awareness. The threat to male power in the home originates in a capitalist system which is exacerbated by women working, a situation that would not occur in a socialist system. The medical profession and the violent relationship resemble the traditional patriarchy in its source of power (male networks), in its ideology (sexism), in its methods (sexual division of labor and subordination of female workers), in its goal (the appropriation of female labor as the exclusive prerogative of specific men), and in its consequences (the subordination and degradation of women) (pp. 484-485). Thus, they observed, "battering arises today as the services attempt to reprivatize 'woman's work' in a context of patriarchal domination against counter tendencies to socialize the labor of love" (p. 487). Ideologically and empirically, the contention of these writers that wife battering is due to capitalism seems quite untenable. Though they make valid observations about biases against women in society and the insensitivity of male-dominated society's response to battered women, they have not proved a logical connection between wife battering and capitalism. Comparative empirical studies to assess the rates of wife battering in capitalistic and socialistic states would be necessary before proposing some hypotheses about the influence of these ideologies on wife battering, and it is doubtful that reliable differences could be found in that, among other difficulties, it would not be easy to separate culture from political/economic ideology.

Most who study wife battering from a macrosystem perspective adopt a theoretical or qualitative approach. Ÿllo (1983, 1984) is one who has used a quantitative empirical methodology to study wife battering. In her earlier study she investigated the relationship between the status

of women in different states in the United States and the incidence of wife battering. She adopted the following definition of status, "The status of women is the position women have as a group, compared with the position of men as a group, in different fields of society" (1983, p. 70). She based her analysis on the data collected by Straus et al. (1980) and found that wife battering is greatest both in states where women's status is highest and lowest in the United States. Using the Eta statistic, states' level of status of women accounted for 21% of the variance in severe domestic violence. A replication of her study using data from all 50 states would lend support to the conclusions she drew. She posited that low status states may have the most wife battering because greater force may be necessary to keep women "in their place" (she does not clarify why this may be so) and because women in these states have fewer alternatives than women in other states. Violence could be greater in high status states, because there has been the most rapid social change in those states, and husbands may feel the most threatened. Violence decreases to a point as status increases, then reverses. Ÿllo concluded that there is no single cause of wife battering; a change in status alone will not eradicate the violence.

In another study based on the same Straus et al. data, Ÿllo (1984) endeavored to evaluate the effect of the context of structured sexual inequality on the relationship between marital inequality and wife battering. Marital inequality was assessed on the basis of the relative decision-making power of the husband and wife, and couples were divided into four categories according to the way decisions were made: (a) wife dominant, (b) separate, (c) shared, and (d) husband dominant. The results were that among couples using a relatively egalitarian approach

(decision-making was a joint effort) to decision-making, there was a low rate of violence (3% of such couples reported a severe violent incident in the previous year). Among non-egalitarian couples the rate of violence was higher. When wives dominated, severe violence occurred among 7.1% of couples, and when husbands dominated, a severe incident occurred in 10.7% of the couples. Husband-dominant couples were violent 50% more often than wife-dominant couples and 300% more violent than egalitarian couples, $p < .001$. Ÿllo suggested that violence was less an ultimate resource allowing them to retain control, than a response to the loss of control they thought should be theirs alone. The solution is not, she stated, to bolster traditional male roles such as domination of women, but the re-formulation of masculinity so that men's self worth is not based on domination of others.

In moderately high and high status states, couples in which the husband dominates decision-making seem to be most violent. Fourteen to sixteen percent of wives in this group were severely beaten by their husbands in the year prior to the interview. Ÿllo observed that these results support the conflict theory tenet that the more inequitable the situation, the more force is necessary to maintain it. Wives in states where women's status in society is relatively high may feel that domination by their husbands is particularly inequitable. Ÿllo also found that wife beating is higher in wife-dominant couples who live in low and moderately low status states (10%) than in high status states (5%). This observation suggests that when wives in a social context of low status for women act in ways which are seen by their husbands as an exercise of personal power, the husband feels threatened. Wife battering is influenced by the husband being threatened with the loss of

traditional symbols of masculinity, particularly when women's status is low in a society. When the way a given couple handles power issues in their marriage is inconsistent with the status of women in society, wife battering is more likely.

Pervasive tacit and sometimes quite overt sexist attitudes in society contribute significantly to wife battering. American culture is one which glorifies and practices violence even as its leaders purport to condemn it. Unhealthy standards of masculinity and femininity and male-dominated perspectives on the way men and women should relate in the home and in society also foster wife beating. Little has been done by way of empirical assessment of general societal influence or of the impact of various sub-culture ideologies on violence against wives. It has been suggested that empirical studies of the relationship between political ideology and wife battering are needed before statements about such a relationship can be made. Studies of the impact of religious orientation and commitment (sometimes related to the issue of sexism insofar as the tenets of a religion are interpreted to endorse the subjection of women) are almost non-existent and primarily theoretical. (See Larzelere & Dyment, 1987, for findings that religious attendance tended to reduce the level of abuse among those evaluated. See also, Brutz & Allen, 1986; Petersen, 1983). Further study is needed in this area.

Rationale for a Multi-faceted Approach

It has been shown that wife battering has a long history and is well-entrenched in the functioning of the family, social structures and

cultural mores in America. In spite of campaigns to awaken the public, to change legal, political and social agencies to ameliorate the situation, the problem persists.

Researchers have investigated wife battering from a variety of approaches. Some focus exclusively on personality factors, stressing the pathology of the husband, wife or both. Significant issues include self esteem, unresolved dependency issues, inadequate separation-individuation and masochism. Others see the root of this type of violence in the dysfunctional marital system. It is an unhealthy pattern of interacting to which both wife and husband contribute that results in violence. For example, the husband learns that by intimidating or beating his wife he can make her do as he wishes, and the wife "learns" that she is helpless to stop him. A third perspective emphasizes the importance of external stressors on the marriage which so tax the couple that they are unable to use other means to solve their problems. A fourth and final approach locates the cause of wife battering in the sexist structure of society which endorses men's domination of women and tolerates the husband's use of violence to keep his dominant position.

It is the view of this writer that each of these perspectives contributes to the understanding of the etiology of wife battering, but that none is sufficient alone. Wife battering is a multi-determined phenomenon and no one explanation suffices to uncover all the dynamics. It is not merely a matter of personal pathology, unhealthy systems, stress or sexism, but each of these plays a part in varying degrees for different couples. Further research is needed to determine to what extent the different factors contribute for different couples in

different contexts. It is, however, the contention of this writer that personal pathology is the origin of all other contributing factors. Distortion within the individual leads to the development of distorted relationships (systems) and to unhealthy ways of responding to stress. And, finally, individual pathology is ultimately responsible for a society that devalues women and promotes male dominance and violence against women, for society is comprised of individuals.

With this in mind, effective intervention must deal with wife battering from all four perspectives. All elements of society are involved as well as the battered woman and her husband: the medical community, mental health professionals, the courts, police and social service agencies, and all have a part to play in the eradication of this violence, but primary focus must be on individual pathology. Safety is the first consideration: once the woman is in an environment in which she is safe from battering, intervention can begin. (See the literature on the efficacy of "shelters," and "safe houses.") To attempt individual, group or joint therapy while the abuse is going on will accomplish nothing, and may even put the woman in greater danger. Once she is safe, intervention can begin. On the ontogenic level, individual therapy and separate group therapy for battered women and the husbands is the treatment of choice. Microsystem intervention would entail conjoint therapy, only possible if the husband is willing to admit that the violence is a problem, and only advisable if the violence is addressed as the foremost problem, and not merely as a symptom, and again, only if the wife is safe. (There is a body of literature dealing with various systems approaches, including communication training and anger management.) On the exosystem and macrosystem levels, society can

help by funding shelters and making their existence widely known in the community and raising the public awareness of the fact that wife battering is pathological and criminal, not funny nor merely a domestic problem with which "outsiders" should not become involved. Stopping the glorification of violence and stereotyping of women in the media and limiting the accessibility of weapons, particularly guns, can help change the way people view violent acts. Funding parenting classes for parents interested in learning non-violent ways of raising children so that the children can learn non-violent ways of resolving differences would be another way society can help. And, finally, improvement of opportunities for women to attain equal opportunity and status in society is essential. None of this will be easy, and it will be impossible if everyone says "Society should do something about it." Instead, the responsibility to stop wife battering, as the responsibility for its occurrence, lies ultimately with the individual.

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